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SIPDIS

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL

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SUBJECT: CAMBODIA'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO ANNOUNCE FORMATION  
OF BURMA CAUCUS

Classified By: A/DCM Margaret McKean, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. Recent meetings with members of the National Assembly's Commission on Foreign Affairs suggests the Cambodian body is prepared to announce in early September the formation of a Burma Caucus comprised of MPs from the ruling CPP, FUNCINPEC and opposition Sam Rainsy Party. As a result of meetings with Prime Minister Hun Sen and NA President Heng Samrin, SRP lawmaker (and head of the Commission on Foreign Affairs) Son Chhay will travel to Jakarta June 18-19 to discuss the launching of the Cambodian NA's Burma Caucus with the ASEAN Inter-Parliament Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC). Son Chhay would like to expand the inauguration of the Caucus with a one-day conference on Burma, and is seeking donor support for this initiative. Cambodia is the last of the six ASEAN member states of AIPMC to launch a Caucus, and the Cambodian legislature's first endeavor at addressing a non-domestic issue. We have worked hard to encourage Cambodian activism on human rights and democracy in Burma -- including during recent high-level State Department visits -- and believe support for the conference -- if needed -- is worthy of our consideration. End Summary.

Prime Minister, CPP Support National Assembly Burma Caucus  
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12. (C) Recent meetings with SRP parliamentarian Son Chhay, who is head of the National Assembly's Commission on Foreign Affairs, and the Commission's Vice Chairman, Un Ning (a CPP representative), indicate that there is RGC agreement from both the Prime Minister as well as National Assembly President Heng Samrin that the National Assembly form a Burma Caucus comprised of MPs from the three political parties (CPP, FUNCINPEC, SRP) represented in the NA. The inauguration date is tentatively scheduled for early September. Son Chhay met with Prime Minister Hun Sen on May 23 when the PM visited the National Assembly during the vote for the new Labor Minister. In discussing the proposed Burma Caucus, the PM reportedly mentioned that EAP DAS Eric John had met with the PM and urged Cambodia to play a stronger role in pushing for democratic reform in Burma. The PM added that he might include a stop in Rangoon during an upcoming visit to India. Son Chhay also related that the PM indicated that Cambodia needs time to consider how best to deal with Burma, but that a National Assembly role is a good start. The PM gave his full support for the formation of the Burma Caucus through the Commission on Foreign Affairs. He further agreed to meet with ASEAN parliamentarians who come to Phnom Penh for the launch of the Caucus in September. According to Son Chhay, the PM wants Son Chhay to promote within AIPMC the PM's suggestion that the ASEAN Troika visit Rangoon.

13. (SBU) When asked how many people might come from around

the region for the inauguration of the Caucus, Son Chhay said it would depend on the budget. He plans to visit AIPMC headquarters in Jakarta June 18-19 to discuss Cambodia's plans to launch a Burma Caucus, see what budgetary support AIPMC might offer, as well as programming suggestions. The SRP legislator anticipates that FUNCINPEC MP Than Sina and CPP MP (and Commission Vice Chair) Un Ning are likely to accompany him, but funding is an issue. National Assembly President Heng Samrin has approved NA budget funds to support the Caucus launch, but sending the three MPs to AIPMC in Malaysia may not be possible, and only Son Chhay may go.

14. (C) In a separate meeting with Un Ning, the CPP MP told A/DCM that the idea of a Burma Caucus is completely new to the National Assembly and the CPP. Burma has never been raised within the NA nor within the CPP, he noted. Un Ning said that he personally supported democracy in Burma and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, but up until recently, Cambodia has joined with Laos and Vietnam to protect Burma. In the past, the CPP and Prince Ranariddh did not allow their MPs to go to Kuala Lumpur for AIPMC meetings, even though Cambodia was a member. The Prime Minister's recent interest in Burma has been the key to the change in policy, which Un Ning welcomes. Un Ning added that some CPP lawmakers are reluctant to support democracy in Burma as they feel it will lead to instability. A/DCM assured Un Ning that the USG supports a peaceful democratic reform program in Burma. Un Ning noted that it has been difficult for Cambodia to break old ties with its former communist allies in Laos and Vietnam. He concluded that Cambodia moves further away from both countries as it moves closer to the United States.

15. (C) In discussing his meeting with Un Ning and NA President Heng Samrin following A/DCM's meeting with Un Ning, Son Chhay noted that both CPP officials worried about

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Cambodia's image and the reaction by others in ASEAN when Cambodia makes the announcement regarding the Caucus. He said that assured both men that within AIPMC, Cambodia is the last country to establish its own national Caucus within its parliamentary body, and Cambodia will adhere to policy positions regarding Burma already staked out by ASEAN. Nevertheless, Heng Samrin noted that Cambodia has not taken positions regarding ASEAN members' internal affairs not has the National Assembly pursued an issue outside Cambodia's domestic politics. Son Chhay said that the establishment of the Caucus is a very new concept to old line CPP members, as is the idea of working across party lines with the SRP. The SRP MP believes that the Caucus will provide a useful working model for CPP-SRP cooperation within the National Assembly, noting that Un Ning was surprised about the amount of latitude Sam Rainsy provides to Son Chhay to make decisions on such issues.

16. (SBU) Son Chhay asked if the Embassy might be able to help provide support to a one-day conference on Burma following the inauguration of the Burma Caucus in September. There is no budget yet as Son Chhay is uncertain how much he might be able to get from the National Assembly as well as AIPMC. He met with the German Ambassador earlier in the week, and the German diplomat reportedly expressed interest in the proposed conference. Son Chhay said he would also appreciate any suggestions the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon might have regarding invitees from the Burmese government, the exile community, and specialists on Burma currently working in the country.

Comment  
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17. (C) At this stage, it is too early to assess if USG funding/support will be requested or needed. USG assistance to a conference on Burma would lessen the impact of an ASEAN-driven initiative, and our preference would be that other means be found to assist the Cambodians in this

endeavor. However, once we have a clear idea that this proposal is moving forward -- and the National Assembly requests outside financial support and assistance -- we might consider indirect ways to help should a lack of financing lead to the proposed conference not taking place. We will confer with our German colleagues regarding potential funding from the EU, and note that in 2005, the European Institute for Asian Studies organized a three-day meeting involving Members of European Parliament and AIPMC members. We welcome any suggestions Embassy Rangoon has related to Son Chhay's request in para. 6. End Comment.

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